

Kenai National Wildlife Refuge celebrates 60th birthday

by Bill Kent

Saturday we will be hosting a birthday party. Sixty years ago, President Franklin Roosevelt signed an Executive Order establishing the Kenai National Moose Range. President Roosevelt signed the order on Dec. 16, just nine days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. This has always been a source of amazement and some pride to me, because he must have thought that providing protection of the natural resources in Alaska warranted taking action, even though the nation was about to begin a prolonged period of war.

Our celebration will take place at the refuge headquarters/visitor center on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna. Activities will begin at 11 a.m. and end at 3 p.m. Food and music will be provided, and the Anchorage Bird Treatment and Learning Center will be on hand with its impressive raptors, including a golden eagle. A barbershop quartet, “4 on the Richter Scale,” will perform at 12:30.

Scheduled activities include:

- A pictorial history of Kenai NWR that depicts different activities through the years;
 - Biology displays of studies conducted over the last 60 years on eagles, swans, moose, wolves, caribou, and spruce bark beetles;
 - A montage of aerial photos showing the changes in vegetation and glaciers;
 - Fire equipment changes over the years;
 - Activities of the Kenai Fisheries Resources Office through the years;
 - Former employees and local citizens will relate their memories of the refuge;
 - Kids activities from 60 years ago, with a “critter twist;”
 - The reconstructed Andrew Berg cabin from the Tustumena Lake area.
- There will also be displays from Marathon Oil Co. and Unocal relating history of the oil fields on the refuge and what the future improvements will entail.

We hope that you will come and celebrate with us and take a few minutes to reflect on the similarities between now and 60 years ago. As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, President Roosevelt signed the Executive Order just nine days after the attack on Pearl Harbor. With all that must have been on his mind, he took time to provide protection for what is now the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

When he acted, he added to the fledgling National Wildlife Refuge System some 2 million acres of relatively undisturbed habitat for a variety of Alaska species, especially for the purpose of “protecting the natural breeding and feeding range of the giant Kenai moose on the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska, which in this area presents a unique wildlife feature and an unusual opportunity for the study in its natural environment of the practical management of a big game species that has considerable local economic value ...”

I am proud of what the Kenai refuge provides to the citizens of the Kenai Peninsula, Alaska and the United States. The National Wildlife Refuge system is a unique system with nothing else in the world to compare. No other nation has provided for wildlife and habitats the way America has.

During these times of reflection on what America means to each of us, I hope you will give some thought to the foresight of President Roosevelt and the gift that he provided for every American.

See you Saturday.

Bill Kent has been the supervisory park ranger at Kenai refuge since 1991. He lives in Sterling with his preschool teacher wife, Lisa, SoHi student daughter, Riley, and an exchange student, Na, from Thailand. For more information about the Refuge, visit the headquarters on Ski Hill Road in Soldotna, call 262-7021 or see the website at <http://www.fws.gov/refuge/kenai/>.